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SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF THIS PAGE

AD-A277 017

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1a. REPORT SECURITY CLASSIFICATION Unclassified		3. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY OF REPORT Distribution Statement A: Approved for public release; distribution is unlimited.			
2a. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION AUTHORITY N/A		5. MONITORING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER(S) Same			
2b. DECLASSIFICATION / DOWNGRADING SCHEDULE N/A		7a. NAME OF MONITORING ORGANIZATION National Defense University			
4. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER(S) NDU-ICAF-93-A4/2		6b. OFFICE SYMBOL (If applicable) ICAF-FAP			
6a. NAME OF PERFORMING ORGANIZATION Industrial College of the Armed Forces		7b. ADDRESS (City, State, and ZIP Code) Fort Lesley J. McNair Washington, D.C. 20319-6000			
8a. NAME OF FUNDING/SPONSORING ORGANIZATION		8b. OFFICE SYMBOL (If applicable)			
8c. ADDRESS (City, State, and ZIP Code)		9. PROCUREMENT INSTRUMENT IDENTIFICATION NUMBER			
		10. SOURCE OF FUNDING NUMBERS PROGRAM ELEMENT NO.	PROJECT NO.	TASK NO.	WORK UNIT ACCESSION NO.
11. TITLE (Include Security Classification) Mexican Perspectives on Mexican-U.S. Relations					
12. PERSONAL AUTHOR(S) Maurice Parker					
13a. TYPE OF REPORT Research		13b. TIME COVERED FROM Aug 92 TO Apr 93		14. DATE OF REPORT (Year, Month, Day) April 1993	
15. PAGE COUNT 36					
16. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTATION					
17. COSATI CODES FIELD GROUP SUB-GROUP		18. SUBJECT TERMS (Continue on reverse if necessary and identify by block number)			
19. ABSTRACT (Continue on reverse if necessary and identify by block number) SAB 17 MAR 1994					
20. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY OF ABSTRACT <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> UNCLASSIFIED/UNLIMITED <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> SAME AS RPT. <input type="checkbox"/> DTIC USERS		21. ABSTRACT SECURITY CLASSIFICATION Unclassified			
22a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE INDIVIDUAL Judy Clark		22b. TELEPHONE (Include Area Code) (202) 475-1889		22c. OFFICE SYMBOL ICAF-FAP	

1993
Executive Research Project
A42

Mexican Perspectives on Mexican-U.S. Relations

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Department of State**

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Dr. Robert Scheina



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Mexican politicians and intellectuals view the U.S. as a "somewhat pretentious, probably conceited, and often hypocritical nation that perceives only those aspects of its own actions deemed worthy of its own mythology. Whether on the subject of Texas independence or today's 'war on drugs', many Mexicans tend to accentuate the darker aspects of American life, those which the United States itself often refuses to acknowledge in its dealings with its southern neighbor."¹

Jorge G. Castaneda

Mexican Professor,

University of California, Berkeley

Thesis

Can the United States and Mexico successfully implement a treaty if we have different perspectives on the intrinsic value of the agreement? The United States and Mexico must have a better understanding of each other before we can normalize our relationship.

Introduction

To begin this study of Mexican Perception of the United States, it is important to understand the reason for such an analysis. Relations between the United States and Mexico have been historically tense. Sadly, the United States is primarily to blame for the poor state of relations.

We have fought two wars with Mexico to fulfill our Manifest Destiny; acquired approximately 50 per cent of her land; we established a neo-colonial system in Mexico while assisting one of her most ruthless dictators; and invaded her territory twice this century. All of these acts significantly altered Mexican history and aided Mexico's political and economic decline.

Relations have improved considerably since the period of our most cooperative effort – World War II. Nevertheless, neither Mexico, nor the United States has ever understood the other. Misperceptions on each side have been based upon stereotypes and past antagonisms.

Within this climate, the governments of the United State and Mexico have recently embarked on a new relationship, based upon the element that has successfully linked our nations together for the past 50 years, trade. If Mexico should join the United States and Canada in a North American Free Trade Agreement (N.A.F.T.A.), the world's largest trading block will be created.

According to the U.S. Council of the Mexico - U.S. Business Committee, "The study (of N.A.F.T.A.) conclusively shows that a Free Trade Agreement with Mexico will provide a boost to the U.S. economy. Investment is the key. If Mexico further liberalizes and codifies its rules through the FTA, a major boom will occur there. That will be good for us as well as for them. It will increase U.S. wages, strengthen U.S. trading competitiveness and stimulate economic growth across a broad range of U.S. industries."²

Proponents of NAFTA believe that if the agreement is ratified by the U.S. Congress, it has the potential for becoming part of a "new world order" for the United States, Mexico and Canada. The three governments are seeking to include Mexico in the agreement, which has existed between the U.S. and Canada since 1985, because they now recognize the potential economic and political benefits of their interdependence.

The interdependence between Mexico and the United States includes, but is not limited to: illegal and counter narcotics trafficking activities, immigration, trade, water rights, law enforcement and ecology. Even

property values in San Diego, California, are determined by U.S. - Mexican relations. This interdependence demands greater cooperation, and perhaps, NAFTA is the key.

In this paper I will attempt to answer the question of whether or not it will be possible to conduct normal relations given our mutual misperceptions, misunderstandings, stereotypes and antagonisms. I strongly believe that a NAFTA can work if both sides are willing to cast aside past transgressions, change their attitudes towards each other and agree to work together as social, political and economic equals.

Another objective of this paper is to provide the reader with a better understanding of the Mexican perspective of our past, current and future relationship. Using this information, the American reader will have a starting point for improving the United States - Mexican relationship.

Primary Dividers

Mexican poet and essayist, Octavio Paz once described the contrasting cultures of the United States and Mexico as, "two distinct versions of western civilization."³ Expanding upon this concept, he describes the historical relationship between the United States and Mexico as one of "mutual and stubborn deceit, usually involuntary though not always so."⁴

The former New York Times Bureau Chief in Mexico, Alan Riding, cites history, religion, race and language as the primary contrasts to the American and Mexican cultures.⁵ He continues by stating, "these differences serve to complicate their (the United States and Mexican) relationship, to contrast their way of doing things, to widen the gulf that separates them. But all these variables are overshadowed by the inescapable and unique fact that a vulnerable and developing country shares a 2,000 mile border with the world's richest and strongest power. When confronting its northern neighbor, history has taught Mexico that it has few defenses."⁶

Mr. Riding continues by stating, "Congruity with the United States has proved a permanent psychological trauma. Mexico cannot come to terms with having lost half of its territory to the United States, with Washington's frequent meddling in its political affairs, with the United States hold on its economy and with growing cultural penetration by the American way of life. It is also powerless to prevent these

interventions from taking place, and is even occasionally hurt by measures adopted in Washington that did not have Mexico in mind. And it has failed to persuade Washington to give it special attention. Intentionally or not, Mexico has been the target of American disdain and neglect and, above all, a victim of the pervasive inequality of the relationship."⁷

History

Anyone who has lived in Mexico learns quickly that Mexicans are distrustful of Americans and the source of this distrust is history. To Mexicans, history is a passion: their reference point, their guiding light, and their basis for action. History is analyzed, debated, and promoted in the schools and in all areas of the government. In contrast to the American's search for truth and justice in the law, based upon our constitution, Mexicans delineate right from wrong, good from evil, and legitimate from illegitimate through historical analysis and precedent.

In Mexico, the law is not considered a rule to abide by. Instead, it is a concept of an ideal condition which citizens should observe. This is why driving a car in Mexico is hazardous. Red lights at an intersection serve only as a warning. The truck driver or the person with the biggest and oldest vehicle who does not care if his vehicle is wrecked holds the law in his hands at an intersection.

Mexico has a lax legal system, which has been tarnished by corruption, that has made the Mexican people distrustful of laws. Dr. Castaneda also states in his book, "If the United States is a country of lawyers and respect for legal scripture then Mexico might well be the mirror opposite. Laws have been rhetorically worshipped, 'obeyed but not complied with', yet history and its lessons have traditionally been revered."⁸

It is, therefore, the historical record which make Mexicans distrustful of our intentions. For this reason, Mexicans are defensive in their relationship with the United States and still believe that the United States is preparing to undermine their government. Many Americans label Mexicans as "paranoid" for believing this. The Mexican, on the other hand, has history to forecast the future.

When reviewing the history of our relationship we learn that the United States has not been kind to Mexico. Historical references that are long forgotten and obscured by American historians are heralded by Mexican educational authorities and promoted by the government for the sake of national solidarity and the restoration of lost pride. It is for this reason that I primarily approach this paper from the historical perspective.

Race, Religion and Language

Race, religion and language are the most obvious characteristics of Mexican culture that separate "them from us." For the American, whose culture is based upon Anglo-Saxon Puritan Protestant traditions, it is difficult to understand the Mexican who comes from a "mestizo" society of mixed Indian and Spanish blood with a strong influence from the Roman Catholic religion.

In describing the Mexican culture, Octavio Paz states, "The Christianity brought to Mexico by the Spaniards was the syncretic Catholicism of Rome, which had assimilated the pagan gods, turning them into saints and devils. The phenomenon was repeated in Mexico: the idols were baptized, and in popular Mexican Catholicism the old beliefs and divinities are still present, barely hidden under a veneer of Christianity. Not only the popular religion of Mexico, but the Mexicans' entire life is steeped in Indian culture Mexico is the most Spanish country in Latin America; at the same time it is the most Indian. Mesoamerican civilization died a violent death, but Mexico is Mexico thanks to the Indian presence Mexico is a nation between two civilizations and two pasts."⁹

He concludes his comparison of United States and Mexican societies by stating that the United States exterminated its Indians or placed them on reservations. By doing so, he claims that the United States, "was founded on a land without a past The historical memory of Americans is European, not American".¹⁰

Early Relations

When the Anglo and Spanish cultures first met in the New World, during the Sixteenth century, there was animosity. This animosity was based upon European conflicts that were carried over to the New World.

Spanish historian, Jose de Onis, claims that the European wars with their "political, religious and ideological differences had fixed in the minds of the Spanish Americans and in those of the Anglo-Saxon colonists a consciousness of rivalry."¹¹ He expanded this concept by stating, "the fact that England was Spain's great enemy tended to restrict the relations between the two Americas. The English colonists of North America were looked upon by the Spanish Americans as heretics and therefore worthy of abhorrence."¹²

Early Aggression: Remember the Alamo!

Mexicans had their first direct encounter with Americans in the first quarter of the nineteenth century, when the Mexican government authorized Americans to settle in their territory known as Texas. In 1825, the first United States Ambassador to Mexico following its independence from Spain, Joel R. Poinsett (for whom the poinsettia flower is named), tried to negotiate a treaty of commerce and limits with Mexico, which indicated that Texas was within United States territory. The Mexicans would not sign this agreement until that reference was deleted.

Ratification of this treaty was also delayed due to United States insistence upon the rights of Americans to bring slaves into Mexican territory. According to American historian, Gene M. Brack, "Mexicans questioned that (slavery clause) on the grounds that it violated personal liberty and that it was not in fact reciprocal, as Mexico had no slaves on the frontier. The Mexican negotiators also maintained that the slavery clause would inflame public opinion in their country The treaty, by which Mexico retained Texas, and minus the offending slave clause, was eventually ratified, but from this point forward Mexicans associated Americans with their tenacious defense of chattel slavery."¹³

In 1829, an exiled vice president of Mexico, noted while traveling in the United States that, the "American public opinion favored acquisition of Texas, if not by purchase, then by force on grounds of its usefulness or uselessness but that they gave absolutely no attention to the 'justice of the matter.'"¹⁴

Mexican suspicion of United States intentions proved true. By 1835 Mexico had to fight American rebels to retain its rights to Texas. The primary issues of the dispute were:

1. Mexican limitations on the number of Americans that could

settle in Texas.

2. The right of the American settlers to retain their slaves.

The loss of Texas alarmed the Mexicans and they worried about future American expansion into their territory. In 1837, a newspaper in Matamoros, Mexico, printed an article stating, the "Anglo Saxon race would continue to inspire discomfort among the Spanish race in America, because the United States was the New World's 'Russian threat.'"¹³ From the Mexican perspective, these words were prophetic.

American Imperialism; The Mexican War

The Mexican-American War, of 1846, is viewed by the Mexicans as an act of United States imperialism. Mr. Brack claims, that "the process of becoming a continental power required the United States to acquire territory from several nations, but only the acquisition of lands belonging to Mexico required a war Neither France, Spain, nor England ceded to the United States territory contiguous to the homeland, as Mexico was requested and then forced to do."¹⁴ In other words, the acquisition of Mexican territory through purchase or by conquest was inherent in the basic concept of Manifest Destiny.

Many Americans also deplored the war between the United States government and Mexico, for the purpose of spreading slavery to the Texas and annexing Mexican territory. Among the most prominent opponents of the Mexican - American War were Congressman Abraham Lincoln and the naturalist/philosopher Henry David Thoreau.

In blaming President James K. Polk for the conflict, Congressman Lincoln stated, "The blood of this war, like the blood of Abel, is crying to heaven against him."¹⁵ Henry David Thoreau was jailed in Massachusetts for refusing to pay taxes as a protest against the U.S. government's invasion of Mexico. He later registered his opposition in his famous essay entitled, Civil Disobedience. In this essay he commented about the position of the United States government in the war by stating, "All men recognize the right of revolution; that is, the right to refuse allegiance to, and to resist, the government, when its tyranny or its inefficiency are great and unendurable In other words, when a sixth of the population of a nation which has undertaken to be the refuge of liberty are slaves, and a whole country is unjustly overrun and conquered

by a foreign army, and subjected to military law, I think that it is not too soon for honest men to rebel and revolutionize. What makes this duty the more urgent is the fact that the country so overrun is not our own, but ours is the invading army."¹⁸

In a 1989 article in Strategy and Tactics, historian Richard Hitchman states, that "no war until Vietnam had so disturbed the national conscience as did the Mexican War, with its thinly disguised land grab and the potential for the expansion of slavery; and no president until Richard Nixon was seen as so deceitful and devious as was the President during the Mexican War, James K. Polk."¹⁹ Mexicans will readily agree with Mr. Hitchman's findings.

According to Prof. Robert Scheina of the Industrial College of the Armed Forces, the Mexican American War was important for two reasons:

1. It made the United States a world power; and
2. It made sure that Mexico would never be a world power.

I support Dr. Scheina's argument, because, next to the Revolutionary and the Civil War, the Mexican - American War was the most significant conflict in our history. It created the America we know today, which spans, "from sea to shining sea;" and it gave us the land and natural resources necessary to become a truly wealthy nation.

In 1850 a Mexican journalist, Sr. Ramon Alcaraz, warned of future wars with the United States when he stated, "Although we may desire to close our eyes with the assurance these pretensions (that the United States would not take any additional Mexican territory) have now come to an end, and that we may enjoy peace and unmoved tranquillity for a long time, still the past history has an abundance of matter to teach us as yet existing, what has existed, the same schemes of conquest in the United States. The attempt has to be made, and we will see ourselves overwhelmed anew, sooner or later, in another or in more than one disastrous war, until the flag of the stars (and stripes) floats over the last span of territory which it so much covets."²⁰ The United States received more than one million square miles of Mexican territory, including land forming what is now Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, Nevada, Utah and parts of Colorado and Montana as the outcome of the 1846 war.

The "Porfiriato" or the Worst of Times

Mexicans are more forgiving about Texas secession and the results of the Mexican - American War, than they are about the subject of United States involvement in the "Porfiriato." The "Porfiriato" refers to the administration of Mexican President Porfirio Diaz (1876 - 1911). He was a dictator whose pervasive and ruthless administration is considered an embarrassment and the most repressive era in Mexican history. His administration also led to the Mexican revolution, which cost the nation in excess of 1,100,000 lives.

The hallmarks of President Diaz' administration were his attempts to modernize Mexico, develop its economic base, and strengthen its administrative system and economy. He did this by creating a strong police force, known as the "rurales," by promoting foreign investment in Mexico and by placing the agricultural system in the hands of a few wealthy landowners.

Porfirio Diaz accomplished his objectives by establishing an oligarchy, called the "cientificos" (the scientific ones). These "advisors" assisted the president in ruling Mexico. The president and científicos were elitists, who subjugated the Indian population to their will through terror and the promotion of foreign culture. American historian, Jonathan Kandell, cites a book printed in 1908 entitled, "The Great National Problems" in which the author Andres Molina Enrequez states, "The opinion in our country is that we are a people who know less, are less able, can do less and are worth less than the other nations of the earth."²¹ This belief among the Mexican elite encouraged the government to promote foreign immigration and allow a few wealthy Mexican landowners, called "Haciendistas" to take control of Mexican farmlands.

Mr. Kandell describes the success of the president's reforms by stating, " 'Order and Progress' was Diaz's dictum Railroads criss-crossed the nation. New ports were built, and older ones were modernized. Electricity became a source of energy to power factories and illuminate cities. Foreign capital poured into the country, and Mexican entrepreneurs confidently invested in agriculture and industry. Mining reached unprecedented levels: the value of gold production rose from 1.5 million pesos in 1877 to over 40 million pesos at the end of the Porfiriato; the annual silver output almost quadrupled in the same period; iron, tin, copper, and lead deposits were massively exploited for the first time thanks to the low transportation costs made feasible by the railway system. Oil became a valuable new export commodity. The doubling of the

volume of manufactured goods suggested that Mexico was experiencing a profound industrial revolution. Agricultural exports boomed, as huge estates devoted their resources to coffee, sugar, and tobacco. In its heyday, the Diaz regime balanced its budget, recorded heavy surpluses, and achieved enviable credit ratings abroad.²²

The area most affected by the Porfiriato was the domination of the agricultural sector by the Haciendados. The expansion of the railroad lines by thousands of miles of tracks enabled the great estates to grow. The railroads allowed farmers to ship their goods to market and enabled the Haciendados to live far from the large cities while sending their goods to market by train. According to Jonathan Kandell, "in one frenzied period between 1883 and 1895, rich foreigners and Mexicans acquired seventy million acres of rural property In 1895, 20 per cent of Mexicans still possessed land; by 1910, only 2 per cent could make such a claim. As the Portfiriato drew to a close, seven million Mexicans - well over half of the rural population lived and worked on haciendas and plantations owned by an elite of 834 families and land companies."²³

Moreover, two thirds of all investment in this modernization scheme was foreign. Foreigners owned the banks, the power companies, credit institutions, the railroads, the telegraph lines, and everything significant in the country. Mr. Kandell goes on to say, "English was the official language of the trains, thus creating a major obstacle to the training and promotion of Mexicans Only a third of the engineers were Mexicans Even the brakemen and trainmen tended to be Americans. It was a world dominated by foreigners, men with blond hair, white skin, blue eyes, almost all from the United States...."²⁴ In effect, Mexico became a de facto colony of the United States

Modern history has proven that government by tyranny or colonialism cannot last forever. By 1910 the Mexican revolution had erupted in response to the oppressive nature of the Porfiriato. Leading the list of public grievances against the government of Profirio Diaz was the need for land reform and opposition to foreign investment.

American Intervention - Ambassador Henry Lane Wilson

If Mexicans are humiliated by the invasion of their country during the Mexican - American War, and the domination of their nation during the Porfiriato, they are quick to remind us that this wound was reopened several more times during the 20th century.

American intervention in Mexican politics began with one of the most devious men to grace Mexican history books – United States Ambassador Henry Lane Wilson. Ambassador Wilson is described by Jonathan Kandell as being "egotistical and autocratic a parody of the overbearing United States diplomat run amok in a Latin American country's internal political affairs."²⁵

Ambassador Wilson was involved in a violent coup staged by Generals Victoriano Huerta and Felix Diaz that overthrew the government of Porfirio Diaz' successor, President Francisco Madero in 1913. President Madero had been instrumental in starting the Mexican Revolution, which toppled the government of Porfirio Diaz in 1911. Ambassador Wilson had taken the side of Generals Huerta and Diaz, because President Madero had not protected American investment in Mexico from the likes of Mexican rebels Emiliano Zapata and Pancho Villa.

Jorge Castaneda describes Ambassador Lane's interference by citing the text of a Mexican textbook, which reads:

"General Victoriano Huerta was among those [who refused to give up the privileges they held before the Revolution]. With the complicity of the United States' ambassador in Mexico, he betrayed Madero's trust and had him murdered in February 1913"²⁶

Sr. Castaneda goes on to describe how Mexican children are taught the subject of American intervention in Mexico, by stating, "Mexico's younger generations thus learn almost as soon as they can read that the United States has actively interfered in Mexican affairs, not only in the nineteenth century but also as recently as the Revolution. It has done so, according to compulsory textbooks used in most Mexican classrooms today, among other things by having one of its envoys in Mexico conspire to assassinate our national heroes."²⁷

American Intervention at Veracruz

Although President Woodrow Wilson re-called Ambassador Wilson to Washington, the United States continued to meddle in Mexican affairs. On the 21 April 1914 more than 6,000 United States sailors and marines landed at Veracruz, Mexico under the auspices of protecting United States property. Ample evidence indicates that the primary intention of the United States government was to overthrow President Victoriano Huerta.

British historian, Peter Calvert, supports the American conspiracy theory to overthrow President Huerta by stating, "President Wilson of the United States was determined to do all he could to remove Huerta from office. He had already sent as his special envoy to the president, John Lind, ex-governor of Minnesota, whose complete lack of tact or diplomacy succeeded in angering Huerta himself and, at the same time, helped to rally support behind an anti-American stance. Lind settled down in Vera Cruz, where he was soon surrounded by Constitutional agents (a breakaway faction of federal armed forces loyal to the existing constitution, but opposed to President Huerta) who fed him with much exaggeration about their successes in the north Washington moved as far as delivering Huerta a virtual ultimatum. This and other diplomatic pressures he countered in a novel way, by simply disappearing from view among the numerous cafes and bars of the city President Woodrow Wilson, who had since December been engaged in what he called 'watchful waiting', decided that some more drastic form of interposition was needed than either diplomatic noises or financial starvation."²⁸

If the invasion was conducted to protect American property in Mexico, the operation was a complete failure. However, if President Wilson sent the invading forces to Mexico to destabilize President Huerta's administration, the operation was a complete success.

During the fighting between the U.S. Marines and Mexican federal forces, hundreds of Mexican soldiers and civilians were killed. The invasion weakened the government of President Victoriano Huerta, whose army was still involved in the continuing war against the rebel armies of Zapata, Villa, and the Constitutional forces. By July 1914, the American invasion had exerted so much pressure upon President Huerta that he resigned and fled the country. The following month, the United States navy departed

Veracruz. This action provided additional credence to the American conspiracy theory.

Jorge Castanada writes about this intervention, "Perhaps United States involvement in the Mexican Revolution and particularly Woodrow Wilson's occupation of Veracruz were not entirely selfish. These accounts imply that American intervention on this occasion was essentially altruistic: The United States simply sought democracy in Mexico and an end to the Huerta dictatorship. But even these stress the unacceptable nature of United States intervention, both then and now, whatever its motives or purposes. The focus might seem paradoxical, yet it is not untypical of Mexican nationalist sentiments. On the one hand, Wilson is portrayed (in Mexican textbooks) as being on the right side: against the Victoriano Huerta dictatorship responsible for Madero's death. Yet by taking sides at all, the United States automatically puts those who resist it in a more favorable light. Thus in some accounts, Huerta even emerges as a patriot struggling against American interference."²⁹

"Viva Mexico!"

In March 1916, just two years after the invasion of Veracruz, the United States government invaded Mexico again. This time the United States committed a 10,000 man expeditionary force, under the leadership of General John J. Pershing, to locate the Mexican revolutionary Pancho Villa. The United States army was searching for Pancho Villa, because he had crossed the United States border and shot-up the small town of Columbus, New Mexico. Villa took this action to protest the American government's decision to recognize the government of the new President of Mexico, Venustiano Carranza. The army never located Villa, yet it remained in Mexico until January 1917.

Numerous historians have questioned the necessity for American intervention in the Mexican Revolution. And, few have seen any benefits derived from the interventions. American historian, Norman Bailey, is of the belief that United States intervention in Mexico resulted "from the best of motives (after all, Wilson was President), but with the sole result of gaining the enmity of succeeding Mexican regimes."³⁰ Others, including Mr. Kandell, believe that General Pershing's expedition simply made Pancho Villa a legendary hero.

The Oil Crisis of 1917

Following the Mexican Revolution, relations between Mexico and the United States reached the breaking point. The basis for these tensions was the new Mexican constitution. This constitution gave the state direct control over the nation's sub-soil rights, it broke-up the social caste system based upon land ownership, and it abolished the hacienda and established an agrarian land reform system.

This placed American investment in Mexico in jeopardy, which was valued at nearly \$1 billion dollars. The United States government feared the nationalization of all American owned property and filed its objections. In response, the Mexican government stated that the new constitution would apply equally to Mexicans, as well as foreigners.

At this point, the United States government debated the need for military action against Mexico. During this debate, Secretary of the Interior Franklin K. Lane wrote to Secretary of State Robert Lansing in 1919 concerning the issue of Mexican nationalization of American property. In his letter he stated, "I wish somehow that you could be given a free hand in this matter. I know it would be a stiff hand, an authoritative hand, and that is what those people need. They are naughty children who are exercising all the privileges and rights of grown ups."³¹

Congressman Fiorello La Guardia concurred with Secretary Lane over the issue and declared, "Yes, I would go down with beans in one hand and offer help to the Mexican people, but I would be sure to have hand grenades in the other hand, and God help them in case they do not accept our well intended and sincere friendship."³²

The outbreak of World War I distracted the United States from the Mexican issue. By the time the war had ended, a negotiated settlement to the problem was on the horizon. In 1923 the Mexican government reached a negotiated settlement of land claims lost by Americans in the Revolution. This settlement was known as the Bucareli Agreement. This compromise stated that, "Foreign-owned land would be protected from the agrarian reform, compensation claims would be studied by a special commission and foreign oil concessions were ratified, although a new production tax would be used to cover Mexico's foreign debt obligations."³³

World War II - The Best of Times

If the Porfiriato was the worst of times for United States - Mexican relations, World War II proved to be the best of times. Mexico was opposed to Fascism, in part influenced by the overthrow of the republican government of Spain by the fascist General Francisco Franco, with the assistance of Adolph Hitler. Therefore, when a Mexican oil tanker was sunk off the coast of Florida in 1942 by a German U-Boat, Mexico waived her constitutional neutrality and became an ally of the United States to fight the Germans.

Mexican President Avila Camacho and President Franklin Roosevelt held a border conference in 1943 to discuss cooperation in the war effort. This was the first meeting of a Mexican and United States President since Porfirio Diaz and William H. Taft met in 1909. During that meeting, Mexico agreed to supply men to serve under the United States army. Later they sent a Mexican air squadron to the Philippines. Mexico also contributed, "raw materials available in Mexico capital and technology to stimulate production of minerals, metals, oil and food Tens of thousands of Mexicans also received well-paid temporary jobs in the United States under the 1942 Bracero Agreement."³⁴ According to Alan Riding, the Mexican war effort proved positive for the country, because it marked the end of the agrarian revolution and the beginning of the industrial revolution.³⁵

Start of A New Relationship - The Post War Era

The meeting between Presidents Roosevelt and Avila Camacho in 1942 had long term effects. Not only did that conference improve war time relations between two former antagonists, it also set the stage for all friendly relations and cooperative efforts that followed.

Excellent relations continued even after the war had ended. This was due to the close contact many Mexicans had with Americans during the war while serving in the United States military, working in the Bracero program and in American factories. By working with Americans, Mexicans learned that they could trust the people of the United States. Moreover, they learned to enjoy the American lifestyle.

What was ironic about the United States - Mexican relationship in the post war era, was that the three areas the two countries shared in common were the source of greatest conflict. They included:

1. United States Immigration Policy.
2. Western Hemisphere Foreign Policy.
3. United States - Mexican trade relations.

Mexican - United States Foreign Relations

Alan Riding has best described Mexican foreign policy when he states, "Mexico's foreign policy has traditionally been inward-looking, aimed at shielding the country from outside pressures rather than expanding its sphere of influence. Because these pressures have come only from the United States, its policy toward the rest of the world has been shaped by its relationship with Washington. For this reason, East-West issues and even Third World problems long seemed irrelevant: Mexico looked to the world as a defense against United States intervention and it ventured into the world to display its independence from Washington It was consistent with the country's history, it kept alive nationalism, it discouraged militarism, it appeased leftists both at home and abroad and it allowed Mexico to challenge Washington in diplomatic forums without threatening fundamental United States interests in Mexico. Being a policy that reflected the national interest rather than the whims of a single administration, it was also consistent."³⁶

I would also add that Mexican foreign policy:

1. Validates her history, thereby explaining to its citizens the reason for being a third world nation in 1993;
2. Demonstrates to the Mexican people her independence from the United States; and
3. Promotes Mexican economic development and commerce.

Given her policy of neutrality and independence from the United States, Mexico has taken many actions that has both pleased the United States and made the United States government uneasy. For example, it has had uninterrupted diplomatic relations with the Cuban government; authorizes non-fascist international rebel organizations and opposition leaders of foreign governments to reside in Mexico; and it has refused to join organizations that could conceivably compromise her international status as a third world nation, such

as the Non-Aligned Movement and the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (O.P.E.C.).

Security in the Western Hemisphere is another area which unites and divides Mexico and the United States. As a neutral nation, Mexico skillfully avoided the conflict of the cold war between the Soviet Union and the United States. Mexico's voting record in the United Nations attests to its status of neutrality. On many issues of conflicting interests between the United States and the Soviet Union in the U.N., Mexico voted for the Soviet position.

According to Abraham Lowenthal, a professor of International Relations at University of Southern California, "Apart from Cuba and Nicaragua, which concurred with the United States on less than 10% of the issues that were voted on, the three Latin American countries that voted with the United States least frequently (agreeing with the United States less than 16% of the time) were Mexico, Brazil and Argentina."³⁷ This caused the United States serious concern during the cold war.

The most divisive foreign policy issues between the United States and Mexico have been in regard to Mexico's relations with Cuba. Peter Calvert discusses this by stating, "Mexico in foreign policy maintained a consistent stance in favor of allowing the Cubans to pursue their own revolutionary course unhindered, and did so despite the pressure of the United States (which transferred a considerable portion of the former Cuban sugar quota to Mexico), and the often irritating quarrelsome ness of the Cubans themselves. Though at the time of the Cuban missile crisis in 1962 most Mexicans displayed some justifiable alarm at the prospect of coming within range of Soviet nuclear attack as a result of Cuban adventurism, Mexico remained the only country in the hemisphere to have diplomatic relations with Cuba and to maintain physical links with the island in the shape of a regular air service. The Mexican government refused to join in the condemnation of Cuba or to support her expulsion from the Organization of American States. It received very little thanks (from the United States)."³⁸

Mexico would later use her relationship Cuba as a tool, to either curry favors from the United States or to antagonize the United States. Once when embroiled in a dispute with the administration of President Ronald Regan, Mexican President Lopez Portillo told a visiting Cuban delegation, "Without doubt, the Latin American country most dear to us, is our Cuba. Please send an embrace to the Comandante [Castro]."³⁹

At other times Mexico has cooperated with the United States in counter intelligence operations which targeted the Cuban government. Alan Riding alleges that "Cuba was forced to suffer frequent humiliations at Mexico's hands in order to avoid total isolation. The most important feature of the relationship was Cubana de Aviacion's twice-weekly flight to Mexico City, which permitted Cuban officials to travel to the United Nations without going through Europe and enabled thousands of American and Latin American leftists to visit the island. In practice, the Mexican gesture was less than generous. The Central Intelligence Agency was allowed to oversee the Mexican end of the air link, with all travelers to and from Cuba photographed at Mexico City airport and their trips recorded with a huge stamp in their passports. Mexican authorities also cooperated with the CIA in tapping the telephones of the Cuban Embassy and the homes of Cuban diplomats and photographing everyone who entered or left the embassy At one point, a member of the Mexican Embassy in Havana was exposed as a CIA operator and expelled. Mexico made no effort to deny the charges."⁴⁰

Most recently, Mexico remained neutral during the Desert Storm - Desert Shield conflict. Although the government remained silent on the war in the Persian Gulf and the role of the United States in the conflict, the Mexican press had a field day portraying the United States government as the aggressor. To the Mexican press (which is not free), the United States action in the Persian gulf was simply another example of United States government intervention in an area where it did not belong. The message from the press was a clear; the invasion of Iraq was parallel to the United States invasion of Mexico by United States forces at Veracruz and by General Pershing. The Mexican press went so far as to indicate that the United States was drafting Mexican workers residing in the United States into the armed forces to send them to the Persian Gulf. Unsophisticated Mexicans who remember that Mexicans served in the United States armed forces during World War II, believed the stories in the press.

In regard to Mexican foreign policy, Alan Riding believes, if "Mexico looked abroad at all, it looked north. Despite the importance of an independent foreign policy as a counterpoint to its economic dependency, Mexico - government, private sector, and political groups - generally ignored the rest of the world just as the world ignored Mexico."⁴¹

United States Immigration Policy

Emigration to the United States provides employment for millions of Mexican workers. Thus, the Mexican government receives some relief from national unemployment levels. When economic conditions are intolerable for the poor Mexican worker, he/she has found and will continue to find steady work in the United States, either legally or illegally. This is known as the "Mexican safety valve." In other words, the emigration of discontented or unemployed workers to the United States provides domestic tranquility for Mexico. This migration removes the discontented from the country voluntarily and allows the government to operate more peacefully. Whenever a Mexican has a problem entering the United States, the Mexican government blames the problem on the United States.

During the history of the Bracero Program (1942 -1964) 4.6 million Mexicans traveled to the United States to work temporarily in the agricultural sector. According to Carlos Rico, a Mexican university professor, "Migrating temporarily to the United States became part of the expectations of a significant part of Mexico's rural population. Networks, patterns, and routes were established and became familiar to Mexican migrants."⁴²

The termination of the Bracero Program did not discourage Mexican agricultural workers from entering the United States. The termination of the program simply forced Mexican workers to enter the United States by crossing the border illegally in greater numbers than those who had entered the United States legally during the Bracero program. Since 1974, more than 1,200,000 Mexican nationals have been deported by the United States Immigration and Naturalization Service each year to Mexico.

Alan Riding describes the situation from the Mexican perspective best when he states, "Mexicans quietly celebrate the informal "reconquest" of territories lost in the nineteenth century. Mexico insists that the silent invasion is smaller than claimed in the United States, but it fears the social and political consequences of mass deportations or a sealing of the border, although neither is probable. While some officials favor working out a guest-worker program with the United States, recent governments have preferred the less perilous path of protesting the mistreatment of Mexican laborers in the United States without accepting responsibility for controlling the exodus of undocumented migrants"⁴³.

Mr. Riding's observations parallel my own. During the four years that I was stationed at the United States Embassy in Mexico City as Chief of the Nonimmigrant Visa Section (NIV), I had to oversee the approval or denial of visas for Mexicans and other foreigners wishing to enter the United States temporarily for pleasure or on business. Between the years of 1988 and 1992, my office processed approximately 350,000 NIV applications each year. We approved approximately 75 per cent of these applications. On a country-wide basis, the United States Embassy and its eight consulates processed more than one million NIV's for Mexicans each year. The United States Embassy or Consulate was usually the last alternative for Mexican nationals seeking to enter the United States, before swimming the Rio Grande.

During my four years in Mexico, I received numerous complaints from Mexican government officials, businessmen, academics (including Jorge G. Casteneda, whom I have quoted several times in this paper) and agricultural workers who were outraged that the United States would deny the entry of Mexicans into the United States. The issue of legal versus illegal entry of Mexican workers was a moot point to Mexicans, because they perceive the southwest portion of the United States to be, *de facto*, a part of Mexico. Therefore, no border controls should be imposed upon Mexican nationals.

In addition to the one million NIV applications processed each year by the U.S. Embassy and its nine Consulates, the U.S. mission in Mexico also processed 20,000 immigrant visas for Mexican nationals to enable them to immigrate legally to the United States. Above and beyond those statistics, are the 1,200,000 Mexicans who are deported from the United States each year (many of these deportees are repeat offenders).

Mexicans view entry into the United States a basic right, not a privilege. Mexican immigration will remain a delicate issue between the United States and Mexico for the foreseeable future, despite the statement of Mexican President Lopez Portillo (1977-1983) that, "We prefer to export products, rather than people."⁴⁴

North American Free Trade Agreement - A Look Towards the Future

Perhaps the most important issue that makes the United States and Mexico interdependent is commerce. This is a highly complex issue that would require a book to be written on the importance of this historical relationship. But, the importance of the market to both sides cannot be overestimated.

According to the United States Department of Commerce, Mexico is:

1. The third leading United States trading partner after Canada and Japan - totaling \$28.4 billion dollars in 1990.
2. Mexico is the primary exporter of oil to the United States.
3. Mexico has a large trade deficit with the United States.

The United States and Canada have agreed to allow Mexico to become a member of the North American Free Trade Agreement (N.A.F.T.A.) to resolve trade disputes; to protect their markets against other international trading blocks; to expand their levels of trade; and to improve the economy of the two nations.

Presidents George Bush and President Carlos Salinas de Gotari, and Canadian Prime Minister Brian Mulroney, signed the North American Free Trade Agreement in December 1992. However, the United States Congress must ratify the agreement and President Bill Clinton, must sign it before it will become effective. There is strong U.S. political opposition to Mexico's participation in the trading block, from environmental and human rights groups and labor organizations. This well - organized opposition is capable of scuttling the negotiations and congress is listening carefully to their concerns. Unless the Mexican government and U.S. proponents of the agreement can assuage the opposition N.A.F.T.A. will not be ratified.

What most Americans do not understand is that the economic and political future of Mexico is dependent upon congressional ratification of this treaty. NAFTA signals a willingness by the Mexican government to start a new relationship with the United States. Susan Kaufman Purcell, Vice President for Latin American Affairs at the Americas Society in New York, calls the change in the Mexican governments relationship with the United States, "Perestroika a la Mexicana."⁴⁴

The potential for NAFTA is a long way from the days when any United States investment in Mexico was perceived as United States "intervention." The force behind Mexican membership in N.A.F.T.A. is the president of Mexico, Carlos Salinas de Gotari. Like former Soviet Premier Gorbachev, President Salinas de Gotari is a reformer. World Monitor magazine describes him as, "the world's most effective leader."⁴⁵

President Salinas is attempting to reform Mexico economically and politically to prepare the nation

for the 21st century. He believes that N.A.F.T.A. will result in, "an increase in foreign investment in Mexico and Mexican exports to the United States and Canada will provide better jobs for the Mexican labor force.... and a rise in the Mexican standard of living." ⁴⁷

During a recent visit to Mexico City with a group of faculty and students of the Industrial College of the Armed Forces (I.C.A.F.), Sr. Roberto Ramos, Undersecretary for the Mexican Secretariat of Commerce and Industrial Development (SECOFI) brief us on the Mexican government's perspective toward NAFTA. He informed us that the Mexican government welcomed the concept of N.A.F.T.A., because it could protect Mexico against the type of economic downturn the Mexican economy experienced during the years 1981 - 1987. While providing us with the historical background, Sr. Ramos stated that Mexican trade policies were historically protectionist. These protectionist policies were developed to enable Mexican manufacturers to compete effectively against foreign competition on the local market. After many years, the protectionist trade policies had a negative effect on the economy. High tariffs (often in excess of 100 per cent) levied against foreign imports, compelled Mexicans to purchase locally produced goods. In return, these non-competitive indigenous producers turned out low quality products for the Mexican market. To reverse this trend, Mexico joined the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (G.A.T.T.) and gradually eliminated a number of its protectionist trade policies. He summed up his presentation, by stating that NAFTA is expected to improve the Mexican economy and raise their standard of living.

If his optimistic perspective of the Free Trade Agreement is correct, NAFTA has the possibility of charting a new course for relations between Mexico and the United States. Open, competitive and fair trade policies, combined with better products and additional jobs for Mexican workers could improve the Mexican perspective toward the U.S. government and the American people. In a private conversation with Mr. Ramos, he informed me that NAFTA also has the potential for enhancing the image of Mexico in the United States. Thus, eliminating common American stereotypes of Mexicans and replacing these stereotypes with respect and understanding.

While in Mexico, I took the opportunity to visit an old acquaintance, Sr. Mario Zenteno Sanchez,

Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the Diblo Corporation.¹ Diblo is best known in the United States for its primary export, Corona Beer. During our meeting, I asked Sr. Zenteno the general opinion of Mexican businessmen towards NAFTA and whether it was in accord with the Mexican government's perspective? He informed me that Mexico needs NAFTA for competition. He expanded upon his opening statement by reiterating the opinion of Sr. Ramos, ie. that protectionist trade policies have made Mexican businesses non-competitive. The result was the dumping of low quality products on the local market, which the Mexican people had to accept. Sr. Zenteno also said that the lack of competition enabled Mexican businessmen to enjoy large profits with short term investments. Expanding upon this, he stated that Mexicans do not engage in manufacturing unless they can realize a 30 - 40 per cent profit for their goods. Without competition, the Mexican people have received inferior products for higher prices. He feels that Mexican businessmen are concerned about NAFTA, because it will mean that they will have to improve their products and lower their prices to compete with American and Canadian companies. In other words, they will have to receive a "smaller slice of the pie." Sr. Zenteno also believes that Mexican businessmen are not voicing their concerns to the government. Instead, they resort to old nationalist rhetoric when discussing NAFTA. He claims that Mexican businessmen are calling NAFTA "another American strategy to conquer Mexico."

I then asked Sr. Zenteno if Mexican businessmen will be prepared to implement NAFTA, should it be ratified by the United States congress and Canada's Parliament? To this he replied, that Mexican businessmen are taking three approaches to NAFTA. They include:

1. Preparing for NAFTA, by studying North American trade practices to make their goods more competitive within the trade area;
2. Waiting until NAFTA is ratified before doing anything to compete;
3. And, entering NAFTA "kicking and screaming."

Sr. Zenteno believes that the majority of Mexican businessmen are in the two latter categories. He is, therefore, of the opinion that the transition period following the ratification of NAFTA will be rough for those using all three approaches. Even companies like Diblo, which has a long standing relationship with Anhauser

¹ I request that the source of this information be protected.

Busch will be affected by the Mexican companies that have not prepared adequately to conduct business under NAFTA.

I then asked Sr. Zenteno what Mexican businessmen thought about American businesses moving to Mexico or expanding their trade with Mexico? He replied that Mexican businessmen believe Americans are naive. He said the Mexican market is completely different from the United States market and Americans do not understand what is in store for them. As an example, he mentioned the Mexican labor union known as the Confederation of Mexican Workers (CTM) and the problems of receiving a just settlement from litigation in Mexican courts. The CTM is more powerful than the AFL/CIO during its heyday and Mexican courts seldom rule on behalf of foreigners in trade disputes. He continued by stating that American companies will have to work with Mexican civil servants, the police, the military, customs authorities, and worst of all – the port authorities. This will be a frustrating exercise at best that will probably cause many American businesses to reconsider the wisdom of their investment in Mexico. These potential "spoilers" awaiting American businessmen will make the transition period following the treaty's ratification a painful one.

Despite the reservations of the Mexican businessmen, he believes that NAFTA is the last hope for the economic, social and political development of Mexico and supports President Salinas' efforts. Sr. Zenteno concluded his interview by stating that if the NAFTA should fail U.S. congressional and/or Canadian Parliamentary ratification, the Mexican economy will be doomed and so will the liberal wing of President Salinas' P.R.I. Party (Institutional Revolutionary Party). He fears that a defeat of NAFTA will result in a return to left wing nationalist control of the PRI party that Mexico experienced between 1929 and 1983. Nationalist control of the PRI party will return Mexican - American relations to one of mutual animosity.

Conclusion

The American and Mexican cultures have co-existed for three hundred years as people of independent nations and European colonies. Despite their long and frequent contact with each other, they have not tried to understand one another. American images of the Mexican is based upon stereotypes portrayed in Humphrey Bogart movies, "Speedy Gonzalez" cartoons, or the people often seen on television news programs

swimming the Rio Grande, or picking lettuce in California. The American knows little about Mexico. However, Americans would like to maintain good relations with their southern neighbors to ensure their vacations to Cancun or Acapulco will be enjoyable.

At the same time, the Mexicans have focused a great deal of their national energy towards gaining the attention and respect of the American government and the American people. Nevertheless, they still do not understand American culture, history, or the political system. The Mexican view of the United States, which is formed through studying history from a ethnocentric perspective, is almost as misguided as the American stereotype of the Mexican. The one saving grace for the relationship is that millions of Mexico travel to the United States every year to study, to work and to tour. This contact with the United States is useful in breaking down the misperceptions about Americans that are taught in Mexican schools and perpetrated by the Mexican press.

The remainder of Mexican society will have to wait for NAFTA to gain momentum before they will have a better understanding of the American culture and our government and the conspiracy theory is dispelled.

In response to my primary research question, of whether the United States and Mexico can successfully implement a treaty if we have different perspectives on the intrinsic value of the agreement, my answer is yes. I am aware that the United States and Mexican negotiators of NAFTA are sensitive to the pressures affecting each side and are dedicated to improving relations between the two countries.

Charges of United States interference will continue to be heard in Mexico until we establish credibility. That credibility could be a well implemented NAFTA. The United States will have to discontinue taking actions, such as the kidnapping of Mexican doctor Alberto Machain from Guadalajara and bringing him to the United States to stand trial. This action was viewed by the Mexicans as another instance of United States intervention in their country and a lack of respect for their sovereignty.

Mexicans will have to develop and more conciliatory approach to working with Americans and stop being defensive. Once they learn that the United States is not intending to conquer them again, either militarily or economically, our relations will improve.

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